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F.B.I.'s Discipline Defended in Wake of Arrest

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 4 — Present and former officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation insisted today that espionage charges against a bureau agent represented an isolated event and not a broader security problem.

"I see no evidence of a breakdown in discipline or moral values," said W. Raymond Wannall, former assistant director in charge of the bureau's intelligence division. "I don't see where this calls for any reorganization or change."

Mr. Wannall and James R. Malley, president of the Society of Former Special Agents of the F.B.I., both said they were gratified that the bureau had conducted its own investigation and arrested the suspect agent, Richard W. Miller.

Mr. Miller, who was arrested in San Diego Tuesday night, has been accused of conspiring to sell classified documents to a female Soviet agent in whom he had a sexual interest. According to the bureau, he gave the woman, Svetlana Ogorodnikova, classified materials on American foreign counterintelligence that she passed on to the Soviet Consulate in San Francisco.

"Every so often somebody goes bad, and no matter how much you check on them or try to keep track of them, you can't follow everyone around on a 24-hour-a-day basis," Mr. Malley said.

Bill Baker, assistant director of the bureau for Congressional and public af-

fairs, said the case seemed to be one of "personal frailty, not system frailty."

"While we have not yet completed our damage assessment, we don't believe it will be severe or long-lasting," Mr. Baker said. "The supervision of agents as currently exists is effective; however, we will continue to examine our policies, including the polygraph question, which remains under study."

For several years bureau officials have debated whether polygraph, or lie detector tests, should routinely be administered to agents who work in sensitive areas.

The practice has not been implemented at the bureau, although employees of the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency are periodically required to submit to them.

A national security directive issued by President Reagan in 1983 would have required some bureau offices with access to highly classified information to submit to routine polygraph screening. But protests in Congress caused the Administration to rescind the order, along with another measure calling for lifelong censorship of some Federal officials.

Written bureau policy says that an agent may be asked to take a polygraph test and that adverse inferences may be drawn in some cases if he refuses. Court papers filed in the Miller case include an account of his activities that he gave to the bureau's chief polygrapher, suggesting that Mr. Miller was given a lie detector test.

The bureau Director, William H.

Webster, said last year that the bureau was "rethinking" whether it had "an obligation to use more care in screening applicants and auditing those who deal in national security from time to time, such as is done by the C.I.A."

"We think there's need to move in that direction," he said. He added, however, that he thought it important to "stay out of people's private lives to the extent possible."

"Unless entirely relevant, life style ought to be avoided in polygraph examinations and in any kind of auditing procedure," Mr. Webster contended. Mr. Webster has said that agents are given polygraphs, only to corroborate other evidence of wrongdoing.

Roger Young, Mr. Baker's predecessor as an assistant director, and other former bureau officials disputed contentions that bureau discipline had suffered by Mr. Webster's belief that the F.B.I. should not intrude on an agent's personal life unless it affected his work performance.

G. Gordon Liddy, the former Water-gate conspirator and a former bureau agent, said on ABC-TV's "Nightline" Wednesday night that discipline in the bureau had become "virtually nonexistent" compared with discipline when J. Edgar Hoover directed the bureau.

"The bureau is probably one of the most disciplined organizations in the world," said Homer Boynton, former executive assistant director of the bureau. "It's not as disciplined as it was, 25 or 30 years ago, but neither is the world, or the Army or the Navy. Under Hoover, you were not allowed to drink coffee on the job."